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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is to suggest one area of study, the functional nature of social dialects, and certain principles of anthropology as they are applied to social and cultural change, which may prove of some use to the teacher. There are essentially three pragmatic functions of language in communicative interaction: manipulative, expressive, and informative. Recently, ethno-linguists have pointed out that there is structure and pattern in the way a language functions in its matrix culture. The rich variety of language styles recognized by the Black community has been noted by several educators and socio-linguistic researchers. This information can prove invaluable to a teacher in a second dialect program. Perhaps the most important criterion for the teacher who is committed to bringing about social change in the most effective way is an awareness of the centrality of language to the sociocultural context in which he is operating. He has the responsibility to add to his fund of knowledge concerning the functional nature of social dialects and the methods of effective agents of change. (CK)

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B. STANDARD ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF A NON-STANDARD DIALECT

Section 4. Attitudes

THE FUNCTIONAL NATURE OF SOCIAL DIALECTS: SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE TEACHING OF BLACK ENGLISH

Robert E. Cromack

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1. *Introduction*

Part of the problem of social change that our country is currently facing is a linguistic one. When a minority group, speaking a minority language, tries to take its rightful place in the structure of our society, the majority strongly resists it. This has happened to the Irish, the Germans, the Italians, the Swedes, and to the Jewish people. And now it is happening to the Black people, especially in an urban setting. Their rejection is partly because of language: as with the other groups, so-called "adequate English" becomes "a symbol of full citizenship" (Margaret Mead).

And yet, do we know what adequate English is? With time people change, social institutions change, whole cultures change. This change is natural. It is not decay, generally, but a constant attempt to adapt to the present situation and to maintain a balanced set of systems. A language, as one system in a culture, also changes. It adapts itself to the needs of the people who use it. If these people form groups within a larger society, then the language molds itself to match these groups. It could even be said that there is a separate English language for every speaker of English, for every group of people, and for every culturally relevant situation. The purist might say that we should speak the language of the classroom all the time; but many English "languages" have developed, each one appropriate to a different situation. Real language, then, has many jobs to do as it functions in a society.

In this sense all natural languages are adequate. They are all unique systems which function to meet the needs of the speech community which they serve. Only a natural language "allows for the whole range of human intelligence and responsiveness" (Mead). Furthermore, each dialect of our English language is adequate English. It can convey any message, whether of content or affect. And this includes all social dialects, but specifically

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the language varieties of the urban, working class Black people, the varieties which are the subject of our present discussion.

Non-industrial societies and cultures have traditionally been studied by American anthropologists. They have learned much about these societies and some have applied this knowledge to bring about social change with as little disruption as possible. Now these scientists are turning their attention to the more complex societies of our industrial civilizations, applying what they learned elsewhere to the situations where there are societies within societies. Much recent study has centered on the Black communities, especially in the area of sociolinguistics. I would like to suggest that some of these findings have direct application to the teacher of so-called "standard" English to the speakers of Black varieties of "non-standard" English. The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to suggest one area of study, the functional nature of social dialects, and certain principles of anthropology as they are applied to social and cultural change, which may prove of some use to the teacher.

2. *Functions of language in culture*

The philosopher, Charles Morris, spoke of three kinds of language function: semiotic, syntactic, and pragmatic. The first involves the organization of denotational and connotational meaning in the vocabulary of a language; the second has to do strictly with the formal capacities of a language or dialect. We can not be concerned with these two for lack of space. The pragmatic function, on the other hand, is language as an effective tool. In this view language is adaptive in the cultural sense. It is used to get goods and services, to elicit some kind of response, to provide some kind of release for the speaker. There are, then, essentially three pragmatic functions of language in communicative interaction: manipulative, expressive, and informative. These functions are characterized in the chart following.

*Functional categories**	*Center of focus*				*Code capacity***	
	Context	Source (speaker) ←	Receptor (hearer) →	Source and Receptor ↔	Topic	Elaborated	Restricted
I. MANIPULATIVE*							
A. Emotive							
1. Persuasive			x			x	
2. Scornful			x			x	
3. Provocative			x			x	
4. Pleasing			x			x	
5. Entertaining			x			x	
6. Fearful			x			x	
7. Accommodating			x			x	
8. Concealing			x			x	
B. Imperative			x		x		x
C. Conversative							
1. Contactive	x		x				x
2. Maintaining	x		x				x
3. Dominating	x		x				x
D. Phatic	x			x		x	x
E. Identificational				x	x	x	
II. EXPRESSIVE*							
A. Expressive		x				x	x
B. Impulsive	x	x					x
C. Evaluative		x			x	x	
III. INFORMATIVE*							
A. Informative					x	x	
B. Instructive					x	x	x

BLACK ENGLISH [Data from Kochman]

"Rapping" = IE, IIA
"Playing the dozens" = IA3, IIA
"Toasts" = IA5
"Run it down" = IIIA
"Whupping" = IE, IA2
"Signifying" = IA3
"Shucking" = IA8
"Gripping" = IA6
"Copping a plea" = IA6

* Data from Nida, Williams & Naremore, and Cromack
** Classifications from Bernstein

This notion of language function in a behavioral sense is not new. Something of what may be involved is described quite satisfactorily by Lord Chesterfield in a letter to his son in 1751 concerning an attempt to persuade parliament to adopt the Gregorian calendar:

> For my own part, I could just as soon have talked Celtic or Sclavonian [!] to them, as astronomy, and they would have understood me full as well: so I resolved to do better than speak to the purpose, and to please instead of informing them. I gave them, therefore, only a historical account of calendars, from the Egyptian down to the Gregorian, amusing them now and then with little episodes; but I was particularly attentive to the choice of my words, to the harmony and roundness of my periods, and to my elocution, to my action. This succeeded, and ever will succeed; they thought I informed, because I pleased them; and many of them said that I had made the whole very clear to them; when, God knows, I had not even attempted it.

Recently, Dell Hymes and other ethno-linguists have pointed out more rigorously that there is structure and pattern in the way a language functions in its matrix culture. There are behavioral norms and conventions which specify when it is appropriate to use language and when not, and what level of language usage is appropriate to a specific communicative situation. Pragmatic functions at one point or another involve all the constituent elements of the communicative act—its situational context, the speaker and hearer, the message, the code, and the vehicle. Yet the different types vary according to which elements are dominant in the interaction and according to the elaborateness of the code used. Manipulation by emotion, for example, invariably has the recipient of the message in focus, rather than the message or the speaker; and it uses an elaborated code, with a large repertoire of devices.

There is room to present just a few of the pragmatic functions outlined in the chart. The imperative function is directive in nature, giving commands. It involves the topic and the receiver primarily. Three functions are applicable to conversational settings: speech to initiate the conversation, to keep the conversation going, and to dominate the conversation. These forms have the receiver and the context in focus, rather than the topic, and they tend to have a restricted code. Phatic communication is manipulative in the sense that it controls the attitudes and interactions of participants by establishing or dissolving rapport; it involves both the speaker and the hearer, as well as the context; it uses either elaborated or restricted code. It is exemplified by cocktail party behavior in which a neutral topic, such as the weather or sports, allows the participants to find out the social status and current mental state of each other and to adjust their behavior accordingly. Expressive language tends to focus on the speaker; its function is to give the speaker verbal release from tension; it can range in richness from the "ouch" or "damn, damn, damn" of an immediate situation to the outer reaches of poetic language. Finally, there are informative functions in language, as well as the expressive and manipulative ones. They focus on the topic of the message, and can involve either an elaborated code or a restricted one.

The rich variety of language styles recognized by the Black community as being functional in their personal interactions has been noted by several educators and socio-linguistic researchers. Kochman (1969:26, 31), for example, enumerates and defines a large number of them from the Chicago ghettos:

> 'Rapping," "shucking," "jiving," "running it down," "gripping," "copping a plea," "signifying," and "sounding" are all part of the Black ghetto idiom and describe different kinds of talking. Each has its own distinguishing features of

> form, style, and function; each is influenced by, and influences the speaker, setting, and audience; and each sheds light on the black perspective and the black condition—on those orienting values and attitudes that will cause a speaker to speak or perform in his own way within the social context of the black community. . . .
>
> "Running it down" is the term used by speakers in the ghetto when it is their intention to give information, either by explanation, narrative, or giving advice.

Other modes of Black speech, according to Kochman, are mostly manipulative and expressive. In one usage, "rapping" is essentially persuasive and expressive. It involves projecting one's personality in animated speech. "Playing the dozens," or "capping," or "sounding" is a highly valued use of language. It is a game of verbal insult which may function to relieve tensions. To "whup the game" on a "trick" or "lame" is to try to get goods or services from someone who looks like he can be swindled. "Shucking it" is a form of language behavior practiced by the Black when confronting "the Man," in which real feelings are concealed behind a mask of innocence, ignorance, childishness, obedience, humility, or deference. It is a language of concealment. Finally, "toasts" are long, rhymed, witty, narrative stories, which demonstrate, Kochman says, that ability with words is apparently as highly valued as physical strength.

These examples will suffice to demonstrate the broad range of functional speech styles recognized by speakers of Black English. There are, of course, many others not explicitly recognized by them but alive and well in their midst. As you may surmise, there is a growing body of information of this kind available to the educator who is interested in understanding the culture, society and native dialect of the Black. Similar patterns can be found in all dialects of English, as well. This information can prove invaluable to a teacher in a second dialect program. In addition to this, however, there are other areas of information from anthropology which the teacher must be ready to use. They have to do with the teacher's awareness and attitudes.

3. *The teacher's awareness and attitudes*

While no one has all the answers to our social problems in relation to language, some suggestions to the teacher of Black students can be made. Applied anthropologists have found that the agent of change—which, in essence, the teacher is—must be aware of certain factors in his teaching situation and must have certain attitudes toward the language and people with whom he is working.

The importance of language

Perhaps the most important criterion for the teacher who is committed to bringing about social change in the most effective way is an awareness of the centrality of language to the sociocultural context in which he is operating. As with all human beings, he is working with people whose language is an integral part of them as individuals within a society and culture. A person's language is important to him; by it he interprets himself and his values. The teacher can attack Black English, and by this means attack the individual, his society and culture; or, the teacher can value this language and work through it.

As I am using the term "Black English," it is not a put-down. It is

not an evaluation, but rather a designation, a technical term for a full-fledged dialect of English. Sometimes from the disciplines of sociology and psychology, and even of education, comes the evaluative belief that the economically disadvantaged speakers of Black English are essentially incapable of "doing better." The impression is given that not only is their language deficient, but the speakers themselves are deficient. We have seen from the earlier sketchy presentation of the variety of speech styles that this is not the case. The sociolinguist replaces this *deficiency* model with a *difference* model (Baratz, 1968).

And yet, the teacher must also be aware that it is natural to feel that, because someone is different in some way, he is probably not quite as good. This attitude has been observed by many ethnographers and given various labels, one of which is "linguistic ethnocentrism." It says that "my language is best and all others are different and probably, surely, not as good as mine." It reflects a fact of social attitude and interaction rather than of language or personal capacity. We all tend to be ethnocentric in most areas of culture. The Cashinawas, a Tropical Forest people of South America with whom I lived for a few years, call themselves the Real People, their language the Real Tongue, and anything foreign is looked down upon.

It must be remembered, however, that while language may function to reinforce these divisions already present in a macro-society, it is also a tool to break down these same barriers. Members of minority groups, or any permanent group for that matter, do find satisfaction, protection, and solidarity because they speak a language common to them alone and to their speech community. It is like the high school students who invariably establish their own private language and must change it as soon as outsiders begin to learn it. Even if the outsider may think he is "in," he is "out"—by weeks or months. This private language functions to protect and please its speakers and to mark them as belonging.

If the teacher begins to learn the language of the Black students whom he is trying to reach, he may find that the language is quicksilver, slipping through his fingers. But this can only be in certain, almost superficial ways, such as the vocabulary of the moment; the basic structure and world-view remain the same. He will also find from this willingness to learn the language, that, while the language unites its speakers and may leave him out, still he has opened an avenue of contact with them. He has begun to understand their view of life and can communicate with them in ways they understand. Eventually, with demonstrated trustworthiness and identification on the part of the teacher with his students, rapport will be established and the barriers will come down.

The teacher should be aware from another perspective that the attitudes of the Black students enter into this matter of breaking down barriers. As we have seen, part of the majority's self-defense is keeping out anything different, in maintaining things as they are. And this includes language. Many Black people have recognized that one of the tools of upward mobilization which has great power for them is the very language of Whitey. They have either learned his language or realize that somehow it would help them to learn it. The white-built barriers *can* be breached and the young people know it.

Bilingual or bidialectal education?

There should be no problem of motivation for the student of standard English who really wants to go someplace—and most do. The hesitations may be due to the attitudes of teacher or peer. The teacher must be aware

that the individual values his language and does not want to lose it. People learning a second language realize how intimately one's identity is linked with his language. Sociologists and the learning psychologists talk of "anomie," of the feeling of not belonging which comes upon people at certain stages of foreign language learning. The student wants to run back to his own people; his identity is being threatened. So it is with the speakers of one social dialect who begin to learn a second dialect. The student must be made aware at the outset that the teacher's aim is not to destroy his "native" dialect, the language he uses most of the time, the language he uses with his friends, his mother, in his most intimate times. This is the language by which he knows who he is, by which he identifies himself and others and views the world in which he lives. He should be made aware that what the teacher wants to do is add a second dialect—just like bilingual speakers have added a second language to their mother tongue.

This second dialect will be appropriately used in the situations he will find himself when he enters Whitey's world. He will be able to communicate and to project the "educated" image which will serve him there. You and I know that his education in the streets may have equipped him to survive within the urban jungle. I will again draw the parallel to the Cashinawas, who are not educated in one sense, but who know more about the flora and fauna of the tropical forest and about the times and seasons and how to live there than any modern educator. But both the educator and the Black student should realize that what is needed is the instrumental language, that of the dominant society, as a tool for upward mobility. Teaching a second language or a second dialect is a form of social and cultural change. Rather than erasing the first dialect, this type of change adds something—another language code, a new set of options available to the speaker so he can take on more promising roles in the society.

The teacher should also be aware that learning a second dialect is different in some ways from learning a second language, although there are some parallels. In learning a foreign language the student expects to assimilate a different world-view along with the language. This is not a threat to him—after the first bouts with culture shock—because he realizes that this is precisely a different culture, society and language, and his own remains intact. It cannot be touched, so he cannot. It is compartmentalized. Where learning a second, social dialect is concerned, however, there can be long-range traumatic effects. In this situation the world-views of speakers of Whitey's English and Black English overlap in some areas, but with vital core differences. These differences are conspicuous to the dominant society and they put on pressure to conform to their norms. There is long-term contact between the two dialects, with interference in both directions. There is a tug-of-war between them with regard to the language loyalty of the bidialectal speakers, the situations in which the dialects will be used, and the code-switching capacity of the speakers.

Rapport, richness, and rightness

From an awareness of these forces at work, a teacher should take certain attitudes toward his students who are going to be learning standard English as a second dialect. We all know that there are teachers who "put the fear" into their students, who dominate and tend to repress a student who in other circumstances is verbal and articulate. In the case of Black students there may enter an unconscious, or conscious, racism on the part of the teacher. The child is already in an alien world and his added confusion is put down to stupidity or a deficiency in the language itself, as

we have seen. In contrast to this, let me reinforce just a few of the attitudes which are necessary for the successful teacher and agent of social, cultural, and linguistic change.

The successful agent of change works with individuals by establishing rapport with them. He adapts himself to them as much as possible and identifies with them. In some aspects we are all minority speakers or members of a subculture. We should face our own minority experience, understand that of others, and perhaps empathize with them, identifying ourselves with the students who are members of racial minorities. The teacher, then, should neither be sycophantic, nor patronizing, nor terrorizing. The attitude of the teacher could help in some respects to keep the chip off the Black student's shoulder and prevent his scorn or fear or conning of the teacher.

The successful agent of change also has an attitude of respect for the richness of the language and culture of the people with whom he works. He realizes that, while the "non-standard" dialect is different, it is not inferior. It is rich in its repertoire both of forms and of usage. The teacher does not "knock" Black English to its speakers but encourages a genuine bi-dialectalism.

Finally, the teacher takes the attitude that there is no dichotomy "right or wrong," "correct or incorrect" to parallel that of "standard-nonstandard." Rather there is a complementary set of norms, of expectable patterns of behavior in a given social situation and the corresponding appropriate style of speech to match, adequate to meet the communicative needs of content or affect.

4. *Conclusions*

It is clear, then, that the teacher of English as a second dialect has more to do than deal with only a list of phonological and grammatical differences between such dialects as "standard" English and Black English. He must also be aware of the ways in which individuals and their language are involved in society and culture. Any social dialect, since it is part of a natural language, is adequate to meet the communicative needs of its speakers; Black English has a repertoire of verbal styles appropriate to the situations of society and culture met in the Black community. Adding a second dialect offers a means to a broader range of roles within the larger society. The teacher can encourage such change—or prevent it—depending on his attitude toward his students and their language. He has the responsibility to add to his fund of knowledge concerning the functional nature of social dialects and the methods of effective agents of change.

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